

# Body Paragraph Structure for Lit Analysis & Synthesis

Your commentary should interpret the specific detail that you selected – it should not just restate the quote in your own words; rather you should discuss what the quotation means and how it proves your point. In the commentary, you explain why you found this passage meaningful and how it helps you think about your main point in a new way.

- Your commentary should start with interpreting the text itself – why is this detail important within the text as whole, how does it emphasize the author’s purpose, message, theme, social commentary or style
- Your commentary should continue with how you interpret meaning outside the text – what connections do you make to the world/society outside
- Use author + power verb to prove how the detail conveys the author’s purpose, style or theme
  - Demonstrate
  - Illustrate
  - Show
  - Compare
  - Contrast
  - Exemplify
  - Confirm
  - Convey
  - Prove
  - Explain
  - Establish
  - Reveal
  - Expose
  - Express
  - Clarify
  - Determine
  - Criticize
  - Conclude
  - Develop
  - Examine

**For example:** In describing the child’s life as beginning from birth with “sorrow and pain,” Cullen illustrates the almost paralyzing despondency that comes from a person’s inability to reach for a better life

---

## BASIC BODY PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

---

Sub-claim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start your paragraph with a strong point (opinion/interpretation) not plot/fact.</li><li>• Assert strong, complex, deep point – what the text(s) means and what it reveals about your thesis or the main point of your paper</li></ul>
Elaborate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (as needed, usually needed) Explain any points about the text as whole before you move into your specific details</li></ul>
Supporting Detail and Commentary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>CONTEXT</b> -- Set up the context for the quote – very important! Even though you should assume that your audience has read the texts, you need to give a sentence of background information about the quote</li><li>2. <b>LEAD-IN + QUOTE</b> – work your quote into a sentence (more on lead-ins later)</li><li>3. <b>COMMENTARY/EXPLANATION</b> – do not just put the quote into your own words; go beyond the quote by explaining what the writer means and how the words or phrases (see the back for more). Some of you would benefit from two-part commentary –<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Interpret the text within context of the story itself</b> – focus on concrete details and language and figurative language as they advance the conflicts and themes within the story</li><li>• <b>Interpret the text as you interpret it outside the story</b> – focus on how you link the ideas in the story to either the society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or to our own society today</li></ul></li></ol>
Transition and Continue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Link ideas by discussing how the two supporting details relate to one another -- by contrast, comparison, intensity</li><li>• Add supporting details and commentary until you <i>feel</i> that you need to break to a new paragraph either because the concept has shifted or the reader needs a break as the paragraph has become too long</li></ul>
Closing Sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tie all the points together by reasserting the point in the topic sentence but with more</li></ul>

**NOTE:** this organization is a basic template for what your writing should accomplish – you will probably need to drastically shift the order and sequence based on your particular ideas and concrete details. For example, you may need to include two concrete details and analyze them simultaneously – if your detail or point depends on looking at two points in the story. So feel free to adjust – the key is to make sure you provide a close analysis of what the text means in and of itself, and a deep interpretation of what it means outside the text.

## Tips for Writing Commentary/Explanation – The Extended Version

YOUR COMMENTARY COULD LOOK AT THE FOLLOWING LEVELS BY ASKING YOURSELF SOME WHY AND HOW QUESTIONS:

**From Representative Sample to Holistic Meaning Level** – How and why is this quotation important to the work as a whole? What does this passage reveal about the work as a whole? How does this passage represent the whole?

**Character Level** – what does this passage reveal about a character's motivations, beliefs, morals, desires, etc.?

- How does the character's physical appearance reveal his or her mental, emotional, or spiritual state?
- How does this passage show how the character thinks or feels, or what motivates the character?
- Is the character honest or dishonest? Reliable or unreliable? Likable or unlikeable? How does the author suggest these traits?
- What are the character's flaws or shortcomings or obstacles? How does the character deal with these problems? Are the problems increasing or decreasing in this passage?

**Societal Level** – what does this passage reveal about society's problems, opportunities, inequalities, etc.?

- How does this passage reveal the author's view of the world? Does it show the world to be a good and hopeful place, a cold and harsh place, a corrupt and conniving place, a lonely and isolated place?

**Literary Level** – how does the author's use of figurative language and literary devices emphasize important ideas?

- Analyze the author's use of the following literary devices and consider what the author means in the use of this literary devices:
  - Symbolism
  - Foreshadowing
  - Irony
  - Metaphor/Simile
  - Allusion
  - Imagery
  - Irony
  - Paradox
  - Conflict
  - Mood
  - Tone
- How does the author's use of this literary device develop the text's important messages?
- Is this literary device repeated? Why does the author repeat it? What message does the author emphasize through repetition?